

'Selfhood begins with a walking away

And love is proved in the letting go'

Two lines from Cecil Day-Lewis quoted by Esther de Waal in perhaps her very last book 'The White Stone' subtitled 'The art of letting go' and now quoted by me in the context of discipleship. We know already the method or dynamic of this discipleship from elsewhere in the gospels: it's all about letting go and, ideally at once, with immediate effect. We hear a similar dynamic in the rule of St Benedict in his chapter on obedience

'The first step in humility is obedience without delay so men like these, at once laying aside their own interests, and abandoning their own will, drop their work, and leaving what they were doing unfinished stand ready to obey and follow up the word of command with direct action; in barely one moment of time the uttering of the masters order and the completion of it by the disciple are both rapidly accomplished as a single act.'

Now I don't the about you but I hate leaving things unfinished and we are talking ideals here – something sometimes only achieved after long practice. We had a monk sent to us once whose next expectation was to become a priest but I'd received orders that he was not to be so. He didn't know that when one day I asked him to work in the garden and was met with a very sudden and violent reaction as he started off down the corridor shouting No! No! No! I could only surmise that this was because this didn't meet his expectation of becoming a priest – he'd done garden work before as a novice and then spent many years at seminary and was a very good and able student, he was not going to go back to the garden now! But he did: sometime later he returned in work dress ready for the garden and asked what it was I wanted him to do – like the young man who first says No and later Yes. Perhaps he had the makings of a priest after all, of a disciple that is of Christ, prepared to let Christ do for him what he was unable to do for himself. It was a question of letting- go and a lesson for me too. For in this sense we are all called to be priests, a consecrated nation, a people set apart not to do its own will but that of God. In learning to let go we gain authority for mission, or just as well, the authenticity which makes mission possible and people will respond because it goes to the heart of what it is to be human - the constant letting-go which is life. Esther de Waal is of course also talking about death. She's down- sizing, moving from her beloved home of fifty years on the borders of Wales to much smaller accommodation in Oxford, letting-go of a vast array of books and memories, including perhaps her own and learning how to do this gracefully, that is with God's help, wanting to say ' No, No, No,' but learning to say ' Yes'.

And the White Stone?

From Revelation (2:17)

To the one that overcometh.....

Will I give a white stone

And in the stone a new name written.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour